

Focus:

Students recognize that Aboriginal people's lifestyles, spiritual practices and values are influenced by their ecosystem (the land, animals, bodies of water, plants and climate).

Curriculum Connection:

5.2.2-3 Examine how Aboriginal cultures and ways of life are unique in each of the regions of Canada

5.2.2-4 Examine how the natural environment and geography of a region determines diversity among Aboriginal cultures

Teacher Preparation:



There are many different cultures within what people refer to "the Aboriginal People of Canada": Métis, Inuit and more than 50 distinct nations of people. Everything in their way of life and culture is founded in the land and the natural environment; thus each nation will be as unique and varied as the environment in Canada is diverse. People who live in the mountains will be different from those who live by the ocean; the people in the artic will be distinct from those that live on the plains. For hundreds of years, Aboriginal people have continued to meet their subsistence (physical) needs based on the types of animals and plants that grow in the area and the availability of water. Even the composition of the geography/ecosystem determined the food sources of a people. In areas with more rivers, lakes or ocean access fish is a staple of the people. In the northern bush areas moose, beaver, caribou meat was a staple. People living in areas of muskeg and other wetlands lived on water fowl, eggs and moose as primary food sources.

The vegetation of a natural environment determined the availability of berries, roots, willows and other plants that were required for a healthy diet and for medicinal purposes. The availability of trees and larger bushes and shrubs also determined what type of dwellings that the people could create to provide shelter, protection and places to gather.

The climate of a geographic area, and the seasonal changes, also determined the type of foods available at particular times of the year. Both plants and animals are available for harvesting at specific times and in specific seasons, which in turn determined the migration and settling patterns of a people. For some tribes certain locations were inhabited at different times of the year based on availability of food and ease of travel. For others, settlements were permanent, especially if the people depended on fishing or agriculture.

Key Learnings:

- » The natural environment of Aboriginal people determines how they eat, travel and create shelter/homes
- » The bodies of water in the natural environment (lakes, rivers, ponds, wetlands) determines what Aboriginal people eat, how they travel and is the most essential aspect of their lives

- » The spirituality of Aboriginal people is based on respect and appreciation of the land, water, animals and plants of an area

Materials and Resources Required:



DVD/Online Video
"People of the Land"

www.sacredrelationship.ca/videos

Water is an environmental factor that all Aboriginal people had in common. Water is the most essential component of life and is held in the highest regard by all Aboriginal people. Whether it is:

- » the fishing tribes of the west coast,
- » the Cree living near the lakes of Central Alberta,
- » the Dene depending on the rivers of the north or,
- » the mountain people depending on the rivers and mountain run-off,

water is the thread of life that binds all Aboriginal people, and in fact, all people.

All Aboriginal people have an interconnected worldview. In other words, we cannot separate ourselves from nature. One Elder says, for example, "I am the water and the water is me – what I do to the water, I do to myself". Therefore, the language and spirituality of Aboriginal people is also directly derived from the natural environment.

The acknowledgement that everything that exists in nature has a spirit, because we depend on everything in nature for our lives, leads to the practice of making offerings and giving thanks for all that we take from nature. The ceremonies of Aboriginal people focus on giving thanks for what we are provided from nature and to seeking the continued life of all things natural.

This is also the basis of Aboriginal languages. The language of a tribe or Aboriginal group evolves from the description of what exists in nature, what is needed to live, how one acquires and preserves what comes from nature for subsistence. In addition, Aboriginal cultures had a specific pedagogy for passing this knowledge from one generation to the next. Embedded in the language are the words, phrases and stories that would lock knowledge, understanding and values into the minds of each generation.



Preview the DVD/Online Video
"People of the Land"

www.sacredrelationship.ca/videos

Launch:



View the video “People of the Land” with the students. Just before the video begins, invite the students to take particular note of:

- » the natural environment of each Elder,
- » the tribe that each Elder is from and
- » what they talk about as being most important to their people.
- » Suggest that students may want to make a few notes about what is similar and what is different in each Elder’s story or teaching.

Ask students how learning from Elder’s stories might be different than learning from a textbook or from one book about a particular topic. This brief discussion should lead to the understanding that in Aboriginal ways of learning, through stories, there is a challenge put to the student to take responsibility for his or her own learning.

Activate:



Once students have finished viewing the video give them a few minutes to finish writing down any notes that they wish to complete prior to the class discussion.



When ready, begin the discussion by asking the students: “What did the Blackfoot Elder at the beginning of the video say that young people would learn about if they came out to the mountains?” (NOTE: He said “you will learn about yourself”). Use this as a launching point for the discussion of how Aboriginal peoples’ identity (who they are) comes from the land that they live on and their natural surroundings. Ensure that the following concepts are touched upon in the discussion:

- » The land provides medicines to heal us.
- » The water is like blood in the veins of the earth and that damming a river is like a blood clot.
- » Water, rocks, fish, all things in nature have a spirit because they support life for us (which leads to spiritual values and aspects of Aboriginal culture).
- » What we do to the water we do to ourselves (there is no separating ourselves from the water because when the water is harmed we are taking away the ability to provide water for ourselves, thus threatening our survival).
- » One needs to know the land to be able to successfully hunt animals and gather plants to get food (Cree Elder Len Benson’s discussion about knowing the narrow part of the water and the changes of the seasons to access the food).



Activate (continued)

- » Water is part of me ... if the water changes my life changes (Roy - Dene Elder).
- » We can trust the river (Roy - Dene Elder) ... meaning that nature on its own will provide for us. However, if human beings cause damage to the river, its ability to provide is compromised.
- » Stories are the way that Aboriginal people maintain and pass on this knowledge (Francis - Nakota Elder).
- » Over generations, Aboriginal people have learned that certain gathering places are important at specific times of the year to gather food.
- » Aboriginal people chose the locations of their encampments in various seasons based on the plants, animals, water, and climate at certain times of the year (Francis - Nakota Elder - "This place was full of life").

- » Knowledge is "what the Elders left in the stories and history about the land" (Leo - Blackfoot Elder)

The goal of the discussion is to bring students to the understanding that: although Aboriginal people share common values and knowledge, the uniqueness of each culture is derived from the land and natural environment in which they live, and have always lived.

Note especially that the one common significant focus of each Elder was WATER.

Connect:



Explain to students that the video contained a small portion of the knowledge, values and cultural practices held by each of the Elders and reflect four different Aboriginal peoples from within Alberta. Remind students that there are many groups of Aboriginal people across Canada and each has their own knowledge, culture, language, etc. that has been shaped by the land, the water and the environment.

Let students know that it is now their turn to discover more about the way of life, culture, practices, values and language of a tribe or Aboriginal group in a geographic area of their own choice for their next assignment.

Ask students to get a partner or small groups.

Ask the students to research select a tribe or Aboriginal group from an area of Canada that has not yet been presented in the video. The students will then determine how they want to communicate or demonstrate their findings to the rest of the class once their research is complete.

As a teacher, your role will be to facilitate, support and guide the learning of the students as they conduct their research and determine how to best share their learning with others.

Once projects are complete allow students the opportunity to share their new knowledge with the rest of the class.



DID YOU KNOW :

IN THE 2001 CENSUS, ALBERTA'S ABORIGINAL POPULATION WAS 199,015. THIS IS 6.7 PER CENT OF THE TOTAL ALBERTA POPULATION. THIS INCLUDES FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT PEOPLE.

ALBERTA INCLUDES TREATIES 6, 7 AND 8.
THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF ALBERTA WHO HAVE TERRITORY HERE INCLUDE: DENE (INCLUDES CHIPEWYAN), METIS, CREE, BLACKFOOT AND NAKOTA (ALSO KNOWN AS STONEY).

Note to Teacher :

To ensure that students have the time required to properly discuss the understanding that comes from the video and then conduct their own research/inquiry, it is suggested that "Launch" and "Activate" will take place in one class period. The research and development of a communication tool to share the information gathered by each group will take at least one additional class period. The time allotted for this activity will be determined by how deeply the students will delve into the discovery of ways of life of Aboriginal people and the land that they inhabit.